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## Veterans' Day Tribute: Q-cleared badge holder Charlton Heston's Lab films

This article discusses actor Charlton Heston's involvement with the laboratory. Heston narrated several films for the Laboratory in the 1980s.

## **Veterans' Day tribute: Q-cleared badge holder Charlton Heston's Lab films**

By Madeline Whitacre, archivist-historian, [National Security Research Center](#)

Charlton Heston was one of the greats of American film, appearing in nearly 100 movies beginning in the 1950s. He was most well-known for his roles as Moses in Cecil DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* and as the title character in *Ben-Hur*, for which he won an Academy Award.

Heston also starred in a few films for much smaller audiences, such as *Trust, But Verify* (1989) and *Project White Horse* (1984). Heston provided the narration for these once-classified Laboratory films, which are now part of the collections of the National Security Research Center. The NSRC is the Lab's classified library and also houses unclassified legacy materials related to Los Alamos history.

### **How did a Hollywood star get a gig at the Lab?**

In the early 1980s, the head of the Lab's film group, Charles Barnett, was disappointed in the quality of narration in recent Lab films. One of Barnett's colleagues jokingly suggested that the Lab should get Charlton Heston to narrate. Luckily, Barnett was an old friend of Heston's and, to Barnett's surprise, Heston agreed on the condition that he not be paid for his work. In 1983, Heston was granted a Q clearance and narrated several classified LANL films.

These once-classified films that Heston narrated are now publicly available:

- [Trust, But Verify](#),
- [Project White Horse](#), and
- [The Flavius Factor](#).

### **Air Force veteran and veteran actor**

On one of Heston's trips to Los Alamos he was given a piece of trinitite – a glassy substance formed as heat from the 1945 [Trinity test](#) fused the desert sand. Recalling this in a speech, Heston said, "I took it home and gave it to my son ... because it occurred to me that it was, in a very real sense, his birthstone."

Before becoming an actor, Staff Sgt. Heston was a gunner in the Air Force during World War II (WWII). Heston was stationed in the Pacific and was set to take part in Operation Coronet – the planned invasion of Japan. However, the deployment of the Los Alamos-designed atomic weapons helped bring an end to the war and Operation Coronet never happened. Had Coronet taken place, Heston may have been one of the many inevitable casualties. Because of this, Heston considered trinitite his son's birthstone – without the Los Alamos advent of the atomic weapons, one of which was proven during the Trinity test, Heston may have died and his son may never have been born.

### **History of military partnership**

Heston's affiliation with the Lab is part of a significant and [enduring partnership with the U.S. military](#), which began with the Lab's inception in 1943. General Leslie Groves was the leader of the Manhattan Project, which was the government-backed effort to create the first atomic bombs and help end WWII. The then-secret Lab in Los Alamos was staffed by military members, notably the Special Engineer District



and the Women's Army Corps, who worked side by side with civilian staff to develop two types of nuclear weapons in just 27 months.

More stories, photos and videos related to the Lab's fascinating history are [here](#).



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Trinitite is a glassy substance that formed as heat from the 1945 Trinity test fused the desert sand. Charlton Heston, a World War II veteran and Academy Award-winning actor, was given a piece of trinitite during one of his Los Alamos visits in the 1980s.



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The Laboratory has always had a strong partnership with the military. Lab Director J. Robert Oppenheimer (left) accepts the Army-Navy "E" Award for Excellence in Wartime Production from General Leslie Groves (right) in 1945.



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Charlton Heston (center) during a visit to Los Alamos in the 1980s. Heston, a U.S. Air Force veteran and an Academy Award winning actor, narrated films for the Lab after receiving his Q clearance in 1983.





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Charlton Heston (center) on a visit to Los Alamos. (Photo courtesy of Walt Wolff.) Heston was a Lab badge holder and also was granted a Q clearance to be able to narrate films for the Lab. As a World War II veteran, Heston felt a connection to the Lab because of its creation of the atomic weapons that helped end history's bloodiest battle.